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SMU's Li Ka Shing Library celebrates its official opening

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Citation

Pagell, Ruth A.. SMU's Li Ka Shing Library celebrates its official opening. (2006). *Access.* . Research Collection Library.

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Other News

SMU's Li Ka Shing Library celebrates its official opening

By Ruth A. Pagell

It is not often that a city gets to celebrate the opening of two modern, exciting new libraries located within blocks of each other within the same month. At the end of July 2005, the Li Ka Shing Library of the [Singapore Management University](#) opened its doors to its first group of students and faculty, a month after [ACCESS](#) covered the soft opening of the National Library of Singapore, just a ten minute walk away. Both of these modern, innovative structures are within the heart of Singapore's Arts, Culture, Learning and Entertainment hub.

While the SMU community has been using the library since it opened its doors for Summer Session at the end of July 2005, 24 February 2006 marked the official opening of the Li Ka Shing Library. To mark the occasion, Dr. Li Ka-shing and Singapore's Minister Mentor Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, attended the official opening ceremony at the library while later in the day, the library hosted an open house for the library and information community in Singapore.



Two Skylights offer natural lighting among the third to fifth levels



Library exterior

As a new library in a very old profession, we face many challenges in meeting user needs. Therefore, the library's charge is to provide access to information rather than create large print collections. To accomplish this, we need to provide creative ways to connect our users to resources, hire staff with subject expertise and other special functional skills, partner internally with other SMU departments that support technology, research and teaching and seek out libraries with whom we can collaborate on reciprocal arrangements.

■ Singapore Management University

Singapore Management University was conceived by the Singapore government in 1997 to be Singapore's third university. SMU's goal is to be different from the two existing universities, the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Nanyang Technical University (NTU), both in teaching style and fiscal organization. In 1999, SMU signed a collaborative agreement with the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania to help create an American style institution in Singapore. In addition to offering a versatile model of undergraduate business education, SMU has positioned itself to be a research as well as a teaching university. SMU is also a privately run non-profit university, and its success has led to the impending

Before any furniture moved into the building, the 2nd floor of the library was used for the Appreciation Dinner on 3 June 2005 at which time the keys to the campus were ceremonially handed over by building contractor Obayashi Corporation to SMU chancellor Dr Richard Hu, SMU chairman Mr. Ho Kwon Ping, SMU President, Professor Howard Hunter and SMU Provost, Professor Tan Chin Tiong. The site proved so successful as a formal dinner space that it was used again for the grand opening of the campus on 20 January 2006, a function attended by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. The space was used yet again for the Official Opening of the Li Ka Shing Library. It has even recently been used for the campus-wide blood drive. Emptying the room of all of its furniture provided the impetus to make changes to the study space.

Level Three is the reference and research area, with the Library's small print collection of periodicals, local company annual reports, and reference materials. The focus of the area is the 20 computers which house the special, in-house applications, such as Bloomberg and DataStream. Level Three also houses all library staff. The office area has natural window lighting and a view facing south toward Raffles Convention Centre, the Cathedral, and Suntec City in the distance. Public seating on this and all the upper floors is generally traditional, using long, wired tables. However, there is a lounge area on the third floor and some additional soft seating interspersed. Levels Three to Five also house over 30 bookable project rooms, officially seating 3 to 6 students. Level Four houses the slowly growing collection of circulating print materials and general computers in addition to individual carrel spaces for students looking for quiet spaces to study.

privatization of the other two universities.

SMU opened its doors to its first group of about 300 students in 2000, in a temporary location on the edge of the Bukit Timah campus. The campus had previously belonged to Raffles College, the University of Malaya and the University of Singapore, all predecessors of the National University of Singapore. SMU took over the Bukit Timah campus in 2001 and stayed there through June 2005 when it moved into the city's Bras Basah area. Occupying a 4.5 hectare area, the new SMU campus has four schools: Lee Kong Chian School of Business, School of Accountancy, School of Economics & Social Sciences and the School of Information Systems. The SMU community has about 3,800 students, 200 faculty and 250 administrative and support staff. Plans are to grow to a maximum of 6,000 undergraduate students by 2010 and up to 2,000 graduate students in the future. Each school has its own building and in the middle is the Li Ka Shing Library.

■ Plans for the new campus

Edward Cullinan Architects of the UK and KNTA Architects of Singapore won the bid, over 171 other firms, for the new Singapore Management University campus, which covered the five buildings on the Bras Basah campus in the Civic District mentioned above. Cox Architects and Planners and DEG Architects designed the Administration Building, on the other side of Bras Basah, on the same block of Victoria Street as the National Library. The selection of architectural firms was by international competition. The competition conditions required all non-Singapore practices to team up with a local practice. The jury included Mr. Fumihiko Maki, a world-renowned architect and experienced international competition juror, Winner of the Pritzker Prize (1993) and numerous architecture awards, Principal, Maki & Associates, Japan; Mr. O. Robert Simha, Director of Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA; Associate Professor Milton Tan, Head, School of Architecture, National University of Singapore; and Mr. Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman, Singapore Management University Board of Trustees.



Unveiling of Li ka Shing Foundation plaque with Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and donor Dr. Li Ka-shing

The winning firms were appointed in December of 2000 with a completion date of end of June 2005 for all the buildings to be open for the 2005 summer session. The total cost for the buildings was SGD450 million.

All the Bras Basah buildings, including the library, are designed on the same principles:

The fifth level is a potpourri of spaces. A room previously designated as The Reading Room, with a smaller, glassed inner reading room, leads to the balcony and has furniture that is easily movable. This has turned into a popular space for campus wide events, such as book launches, talks with ministers, and student sponsored performances. Also on this level is a library classroom for hands on instruction, with twenty computers, and seating for about 30. The room has state-of-the-art equipment, including double screen projection, which is extremely useful for library training. This enables the trainer to project a PowerPoint and live research examples simultaneously, using either the web or the documents camera.

The Center for Teaching and Learning, which directs the course management software (WebCT) initiatives with faculty, is located on this floor along with the Course Support Services (course materials for students), which was recently incorporated into library activities. The Center for Academic Computing, supporting individual faculty research using data, is also moving into the fifth level space. Having these faculty research and teaching initiatives in the Library creates a synergy among the academic support services which should lead to an improved infrastructure and service for faculty research and teaching.



Students studying with their laptops

The four floors together comprise about 11,000 square meters of space and about 8,800 square meters of public space. Seating is currently for 1,200 students and the library has been averaging more than that number per day since it opened. Like all buildings on campus, SMU security cards are required to both enter and leave the library building.

All the campus buildings are wireless, although the library also has wired connections. The library is foregoing reconnecting the Ethernet ports in the new collaborative area to allow for more flexibility of the furniture. The library and the university also decided against creating either a computer lab or information commons within the library. All local students are strongly encouraged to have their own laptops and bringing them to campus. It is primarily the international degree and exchange students who use library computers regularly. While this decision was originally uncomfortable for someone like me who is used to a large information commons, there are certain advantages to maintaining a stable of only fifty machines.

■ Library management

In September 1999, the National Library Board, NLB and SMU signed a memorandum of understanding for NLB to provide the management of library services for SMU. The initial contract ran for five years during which time all library

- Connections to the historical buildings surrounding the campus. This includes the Singapore Art Museum and the National Museum of Singapore which form an axis across the Library balcony and the home of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, the Cathedral of the Good Shepard.
- Open courtyards at street level, similar in concept to the National Library Building, which allow for access across campus by the public.
- Landscaping at the concourse (basement), street and balcony levels.
- Sheltered courts, breezeways, overhanging facades and strengthened shading to improve microclimate conditions.
- Similar look and feel of the buildings, with individual features to meet each one's unique needs.

There are also links to the city's master plan, including a new Bras Basah MRT station on the future Circle Line, which will connect at the concourse level under the Library. The concourse connects the Bras Basah buildings, and has a gym and other spaces for student activities, a Kopitiam (food court), other shops and some SMU office space.

All the buildings are made of stone, glass and metal, to give a sense of transparency and activity in the city area. All the buildings also have exterior hanging plants.

Existing rain trees from Bras Basah Park were removed during construction and returned to campus sites, with additional trees added for shading. Saving the old trees, one of which is 21 meters high, was an important gesture to the community, which was concerned about losing the park area. The National Parks Board supported SMU's efforts to preserve the trees. The west side of the Library faces the Campus Green and the trees.

■ SMU's library

From August 2000 until January 2002, the SMU library was housed in a building on Evans Road, adjoining the Bukit Timah campus. It then moved into the library building on the main campus, staying there until the end of June 2005. The campus is being returned to the National University of Singapore Law School and the Library will become the Law School Library

The new SMU Library is named after Hong Kong businessman Li Ka-shing, Chairman of Cheung Kong (Holdings) Limited and Hutchison Whampoa Limited. The Li Ka Shing Foundation donated an endowment to the library for collections and to the University for scholarships. More information about the Li Ka Shing Foundation is available at [their website](#).

The library includes four floors above Level One. Level One serves as a public area, housing the Visitors' Centre and a few eating and meeting areas. Level Two, the actual library entrance, has the Course Reserve area, a cafe, comfortable reading space and a large open area that is being converted into an experimental collaborative work space. The library is working with Philips Design to create an area where students can work in

operations were outsourced to NLB. In 2005, SMU hired a consultant to make recommendations about the library as it moved into its second five years and into its new building. The recommendation was for SMU to hire its own University Librarian. As a result of the consultant's recommendation, I was hired by SMU last February and took over the University Librarian position in mid-June 2005. I found myself in the most enviable position for a librarian; I was moving into a spacious, open, cheerful new building; I had not had to endure any of the inherent challenges of working with architects or builders; and the NLB staff had planned the entire migration.



The author meets with the Dean of Students and Director of Student Life

We are entering an interesting phase in library management. SMU has sole authority for the library; however part of the onsite staff is directly hired by SMU and part of the staff is seconded by NLB to SMU, with the advice and consent of SMU. During this transition period, both librarians and library workers could be employed by either organization. However, from a workflow perspective, and more importantly, a customer service perspective, we want our internal organizational mix to be transparent to our users. All librarians have a primary functional responsibility, such as coordinator for instruction and training, systems development and coordination, circulation and customer service and databases and licensing. However, they are all also expected to serve at our new Information Services Desk (reference desk) and provide user orientation and instruction. While this seems commonplace in many libraries, these services had not been offered prior to the end of 2005 at SMU. We are experimenting with migrating some of NLB's offsite processes onsite and looking to other third party vendors, primarily book jobbers, to offer some shelf-ready services as well. The primary goal, for both SMU and NLB, is to find the processes and balance that will allow us to become an excellent academic research library.

The Library looks forward to its second five years as a time to strengthen its infrastructure and leverage its spacious building and central location on campus to be the intellectual and learning centre for the University providing products and services that anticipate our user needs. With its central location in Singapore, it would like to become a major player in creating a cooperative reciprocal library environment in Singapore.

"I would like this library to be seen as the intellectual hub and a centre for research for faculty; as a place for students to come and collaborate." (MM Lee opens Li Ka Shing Library at SMU campus Channel NewsAsia February 24, 2006 Friday,

collaborative groups late into the evening, when the upper level seating and project rooms are closed off.

available in LexisNexis and Factiva)

Ruth A. Pagell, is the University Librarian, Li Ka Shing Library, Singapore Management University and has been a valued contributor to ACCESS for many years.

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